



# DEAR UPLIFTING ATHLETES COMMUNITY,

Every year, we are reminded that our greatest strength is the people who make this mission possible. Because of your generosity, passion, and belief in the rare disease community, 2024 was a year of meaningful growth and lasting impact.

Together, we continued to harness the power of sport to bring hope, connection, and opportunity to individuals and families navigating the challenges of rare disease. What began as a vision to unite athletes and advocates has grown into a nationwide community changing lives through research, leadership, and shared experiences.

This year, Uplifting Athletes surpassed **\$1 million invested in rare disease research** through the Young Investigator Draft. We also expanded the Researcher Connection Program, helping more scientists connect directly with patients and caregivers, strengthening the collaboration that drives discovery and fuels hope.

Our Uplifting Experiences program reached more families than ever before. Through partnerships with professional and collegiate sports organizations, including new collaborations with the NHL, MLS, NWSL, and WNBA, we created unforgettable moments that remind participants they are part of a community that stands beside them.

Our student-athletes also continued to inspire us by expanding Lift For Life to new sports and welcoming our first HBCU chapter. Their leadership reflects the power of using sport as a platform to serve others and raise awareness for the rare disease community.

None of this would be possible without you. Every gift, partnership, volunteer, and advocate helps advance our mission and extends hope to those who need it most.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to growing our impact, investing in innovative research, creating life-changing experiences, and building a future where no person impacted by a rare disease feels alone.

Thank you for believing in our mission and for being an essential part of the Uplifting Athletes community. Together, we are creating a brighter future.

Sincerely,

**Rob Long**  
Executive Director

**Brett Brackett**  
President



## OUR MISSION

Harness the power of sport to build a community that invests in the lives of people impacted by rare diseases.

## OUR VISION

No person impacted by a rare disease feels alone and everyone is inspired with hope for the future.

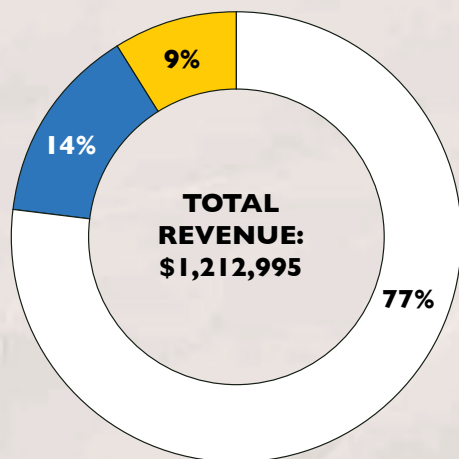
## OUR HISTORY

Built on the vision of one person and pulling from his family's rare disease experience as the foundation, former Penn State University football player and student Scott Shirley founded Lift For Life® in 2003 before launching Uplifting Athletes in 2007.

Since day one, Uplifting Athletes focused on using the platform of college athletics to shine a spotlight on the rare disease cause while providing the student-athletes we are engaged with a valuable leadership experience. Uplifting Athletes provides an opportunity for our student-athletes to enhance the valuable skills they develop on their respective playing fields.

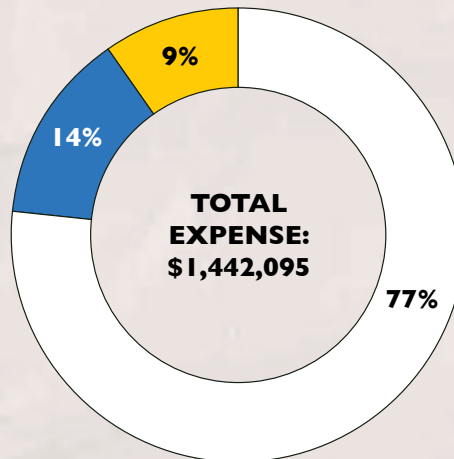
All the annual events and fundraisers associated with Uplifting Athletes fuel our commitment to create Uplifting Leaders, engage in Uplifting Experiences, fund rare disease research, and expand rare disease awareness.

### 2024 REVENUE



- PROGRAM - \$932,671
- CHAPTERS - \$172,455
- GENERAL - \$107,869

### 2024 EXPENSES



- PROGRAM - \$1,108,826
- ADMINISTRATIVE - \$196,624
- FUNDRAISING - \$136,645

\*Our 2024 financial results reflect intentional investments in organizational capacity that strengthen our ability to serve more individuals, expand our programs, and increase our impact in the rare disease community.

# YOUNG INVESTIGATOR DRAFT

The Young Investigator Draft is the result of Uplifting Athletes' ongoing commitment to cultivate resources that accelerate scientific advancements for rare disease treatments and potential cures while facilitating the next generation of rare disease researchers.

**Including this year, Uplifting Athletes has provided more than \$1,000,000 in funding to rare disease researchers!**

To promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in medicine and medical research, the Underrepresented Researchers in Medicine initiative leverages the mechanism of the Young Investigator Draft to fund and celebrate researchers from underrepresented backgrounds.



"I was told that [my] devotion to science is the reason [patient's family] have hope. Thank you, Uplifting Athletes, for creating such a supportive community for rare disease scientists and making our sense of purpose stronger."  
**TOLOO TAGHIAN**

# 2024 DRAFT CLASS



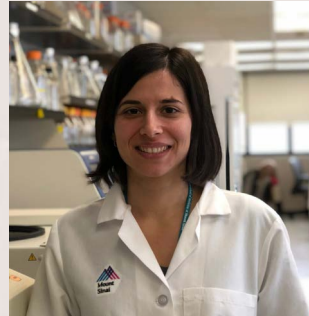
**DR. ANTHONY ANZELL**

University of Pittsburgh  
Nominated by: Cure HHT



**DR. ELEONORA D'AMBROSIO**

Nationwide Children's Hospital  
Nominated by: Cure VCP Disease, Inc.



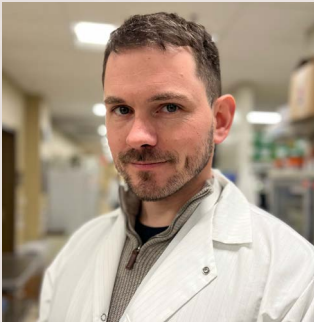
**DR. MARTA GARCIA-FORN**

Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai  
Nominated by: The DDX3X Foundation



**DR. NOAH GUIBERSON**

Weill Cornell Medicine  
Nominated by: STXBPI Foundation



**DR. JULIAN HALMAI**

University of California, Davis  
Nominated by: Foundation for ARID1B Research (FAR)



**DR. DANIEL KENNEDY II**

Baylor College of Medicine  
Nominated by: TBRS Community



**DR. DOROTTYA LACZKO**

University of Pennsylvania  
Nominated by: Castleman Disease Collaborative Network (CDCN)



**DR. ANUSHA SIVAKUMAR**

University of California, San Diego  
Nominated by: The Friedrich's Ataxia Research Alliance



**DR. TOLOO TAGHIAN**

UMass Chan Medical School  
Nominated by: National Tay-Sachs & Allied Diseases Association (NTSAD)



**DR. ANDREA WILDERMAN**

Baylor College of Medicine  
Nominated by: TANGO2 Research Foundation

## UPLIFTING AMBASSADORS

Through the NFL's My Cause My Cleats campaign, players across the league support their favorite cause by wearing custom designed cleats representing their cause.

During the 2023 NFL season, four Uplifting Ambassadors supported the rare disease community through My Cause My Cleats: Nick Allegretti (Kansas City Chiefs), Riley Dixon (Denver Broncos), Isaiah Foskey (New Orleans Saints), and Chris Stoll (Seattle Seahawks).



## LIFT FOR LIFE

Lift For Life is the signature fundraising event for each Uplifting Athletes chapter with student-athletes organizing and executing their perspective campaigns. In 2024, Uplifting Athletes schools raised over \$139,000 from 36 events held across the country. Lift for Life expanded to include five sports: men's football, women's volleyball, women's soccer, men's soccer, women's field hockey and in 2024 Uplifting Athletes invited eight new teams and our first ever HBCU to hold their own Lift for Life events!



"I felt that it was important for my team and me to come together for something bigger than us. It shows we can use our platform for bigger, better, and helping out... I just wanted to do something for my teammates and the community at the same time." JALEN GOSS

## UPLIFTING LEADERS



The catalyst for the Uplifting Leaders program is the annual Leadership Development Conference. Leaders from each current and prospective chapter attend this conference to focus on the development of transferable life skills, rare disease advocacy, and leadership.

This is a unique education initiative for student-athletes to learn to maximize their platform on their campus to raise awareness on behalf of the rare disease community.

In 2024, 68 student-athletes from chapters and prospect chapter universities attended the conference in Philadelphia.

## RARE DISEASE CHAMPIONS

For 15 years, Uplifting Athletes has celebrated leaders in college athletics that have made a positive and lasting impact on the rare disease community. Sculpted by world renowned artist Brian Hanlon, the Rare Disease Champion trophy is in the likeness of Mark Herzlich, the former Boston College and New York Giants linebacker who provided the inspiration for the award after overcoming a life threatening battle with the rare disease Ewing's sarcoma in 2009.

The 2023 team consisted of Boone Bonnema (Western Michigan University), Taylor de Boer (University of Illinois), and Mitch Mason (University of North Carolina).

## 10,000 MILE CHALLENGE

The rare disease community is a diverse ecosystem of individuals who, together, are stronger when we work together. Through the Uplifting Athletes 10,000 Mile Challenge, people from all walks of life are invited to measure their steps to help reach our 10,000 mile collective goal and our ultimate fundraising goal. With 21 teams and 271 participants, we were able to raise more than \$22,400 and hit our 10,000 mile goal!



# TOUCHDOWN PLEDGE DRIVES

During the 2023-2024 college football season, several chapters dedicated their games to support of the Uplifting Athletes mission by holding a Touchdown Pledge Drive. A total of ten chapters participated in Touchdown Pledge Drive, and more than \$5,000 was raised to support the rare disease community.

# RESEARCHER CONNECTION PROGRAM

The Researcher Connection Program assists with travel expenses for researchers and professional students interested in the rare disease field. This funding provides opportunities for these individuals to connect in-person with those directly impacted by their research to foster collaboration and communication.

Within its second year, the Research Connection Program was able to support participants with a wide variety of focus areas which included: CACNA1A, Tatton-Brown-Rahman syndrome, oxalosis and hyperoxaluria, SLC6A1, porphyrias, valosin-containing protein disease, congenital disorders of glycosylation, Smith-Kingsmore syndrome, ataxia telangiectasia, Tay-Sachs and allied diseases, cerebral creatine deficiency syndromes, SCN2A, and more. Uplifting Athletes was able to provide more than \$53,000 of funds to 33 researchers.



“One of the highlights was the invaluable opportunity to exchange ideas with patient advocates, a crucial aspect that seamlessly complemented the academic discussions. These interactions not only strengthened my commitment to patient-centric research, but also provided a unique forum for bridging the gap between researchers and patients.” **ARDIT FEINAJ**

# REPS FOR RARE DISEASES

For the tenth consecutive year, Uplifting Athletes empowered NFL prospects with the opportunity to use the NFL Combine or NFL Pro Day as a platform to give back by raising funds and awareness in support of the rare disease community. With 13 NFL participating athletes during the 2024 Reps for Rare Diseases campaign, nearly \$10,000 was raised to create an exceptional impact.

## UPLIFTING EXPERIENCES

To create a brighter future where no person affected by rare diseases feels alone, Uplifting Athletes offers Uplifting Experiences as an opportunity to harness the power of sport to bring communities together. An Uplifting Experience connects people of all ages impacted by rare disease with an athlete, team, or sports organization for a unique and memorable experience at no cost to participants.

Throughout the year, Uplifting Athletes hosted 652 participants at 56 events across the country.

Uplifting Athletes partnered with over 30 different professional and collegiate sports teams for Uplifting Experiences, included our first partnerships within the NHL, MLS, NWSL, and WNBA.



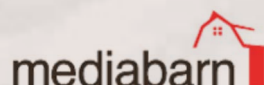
“...The opportunity to participate in experiences like this is so important to us because sometimes our lives seem completely consumed by the medical aspect and struggles of our lives that being able to push pause on all of that and just get to enjoy each other in a non-medical capacity is truly a blessing.” **BRITTANY MCWILLIAMS**

# A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR 2024 PARTNERS

## SPONSORS



## MEDIA PARTNERS



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